

**Video Poetry: Cameras in the Classroom**  
*a multi-disciplinary video production project*  
**Activity Contributed by Heather Lyons**

<b><u>Grade level:</u></b>	<b>5th-12th</b>
<b><u>Materials:</u></b>	<b>1. Video tape 2. Varied arts supplies 3. <u>Basic Camera Shots</u> - one handout per student</b>
<b><u>Equipment:</u></b>	<b>1. Video camera 2. TV monitor (preferably one that can be connected to the camera)</b>
<b><u>Time:</u></b>	<b>Minimum of five 60 minute sessions</b>
<b><u>Core Content Addressed:</u></b>	<p><b><u>Creating/Performing:</u></b>  <b>Effectively use a variety of art media to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories. (2.22)</b>  <b>Incorporate the elements of art and principles of design to generate several solutions to a variety of visual art problems (2.22, 2.23)</b>  <b><u>Students use technology to communicate information and ideas. (1.16)</u></b>  <b><u>Students connect knowledge and experiences from different subject areas. (6.1)</u></b></p>

**Overview:** Video Poetry is a natural extension of any creative writing project and can combine the written word, the spoken word, visuals (natural and created), sounds and music evoked through the writing. It encourages students to explore the words, phrases, images, and abstract and literal meanings of the words in the selected writing and to express the writing in a new way through the selection of images to accompany the poetry. This project also allows students to explore the technical and creative aspects of video production.

This same process can be used with a variety of projects. For instance, students can write down personal stories or collect stories from family members and use family photographs and/or artifacts for the visual component.

**Introduction:** To give the students an idea of what they're working toward, you might want to use an abbreviated version of the process outlined below to create a quick example in class before students get started. For instance, you could pick a simple short poem ("Roses are red, violets . . .") and shoot four images while students read the four lines. Then play it back for them to see how it fits together.

**Activity**

- I. **The Poetry - can be created or chosen in a variety of ways:**
  - A. **Each student can create his/her own poem.** A suggested subject area can help them get started, or you might use one of the poetry activities from this booklet (Connecting with Lines (page 20), Traditional Music and Visual Images (page 69), Drawing the Classics, (page 76), etc.

**B. The class (or group) can create a collaborative poem.** This is a fun exercise that produces wonderful poetry that the students are excited about. (A collaborative project also helps in terms of classroom time). See the samples at the end of this activity.

1. A subject area or idea can be assigned or decided upon by the class. Ask students to brainstorm and write down individual words that they associate with that subject.
2. Individually, the students then write sentences or phrases using the words they had listed, without worrying about one sentence relating to the next.
3. Take the students' written work and type it up, in any order (without the students' names), including all the sentences or phrases from each student and give copies to each student. Then, out loud, in class, have the students create a poem from their own writings. (To give the students an example, you can create a poem using your own selection of some of their sentences.) Don't worry about using all of the writings, just whatever works as the poem develops. Reread it several times, try different approaches, and revise it until the class is satisfied.

**C. Use a poem** from a specific author, culture or time period. For instance, look at writers of Latin America or Appalachia, use poetry from a particular time period, or study poetry that explores a theme relevant to your curriculum.

## **II. Pre-Production Planning**

If the students have written their own poems, they can work individually to develop their own visual ideas. If the poem has been developed as a collaborative project, divide the class into groups and assign each group a certain number of lines (or stanzas) that they are responsible for visualizing.

**A. Create a Storyboard.** This is a tool (a kind of road map) for the students to plan, picture by picture and line by line, what kinds of images they want to use to accompany the words of the poem. The storyboard is a series of squares on a page (to represent the TV screen) with room underneath each square for writing out the words or sounds that will accompany each image. Students sketch pictures of what they want to shoot -- one box represents one shot. Underneath or beside each box, the students write the words that will be heard as each image is seen. A blank storyboard is on page 114, and a sample on page 115.

Students enjoy using the technical terminology of the media when completing their storyboards. Distribute the Basic Camera Shots handout (page 113) to give them ideas on how to describe the type of shot they want to take of each image.

NOTE: This storyboard differs from the one used in the Native American/African Mask activity (page 18). That type of storyboard (which is used by writers and storytellers) gives an overview of the main ideas. It is not intended to record every detail of the written or retold story. This type of storyboard (which is used in media arts) records each detail of the planned production.

- B. The Visuals.** The visuals can be from a variety of sources and students should be encouraged to be as inventive as possible and to think of abstract rather than just literal interpretations of the words. Options for the images can include "live action footage" such as the classroom, their classmates, cars on the road, a creek, etc. They can shoot photographs or illustrations from books or magazines or create their own illustrations, sculptures, models or arrangements of objects. They can use the words from the poem on the screen (shooting their words drawn on a piece of paper or shooting close-ups from newspaper headlines, etc.) Encourage the students to move the camera to different locations and remember that close-up images that fill the entire frame are more interesting than wide shots with no focal point. The students might also want to draw a "title card" to use at the beginning and to create end credits by drawing "produced by" cards along with their names.
- C. Plan the Sound.** Each student or group will decide if and what kind of sound they want. They can choose to have one student read the entire poem, to have a different student read each line, or to have students read some of the lines and leave other lines silent because they are going to visually put the line of the poem on the screen. They may also choose to use some sound effects in the background as the students are reading the poem. Sound or music can also be used to set the mood for an introductory or ending sequence of the video poem.
- D. Rehearse.** When all the students or groups are finished with their storyboards and with the creation of any original artwork or props, do a couple of run-throughs with the reading of the poem along with the shooting of the images. This will help you match the time it takes to read a line with the time necessary to see the particular image. Don't be afraid to leave some moments of silence between each line so that the images stay on the screen long enough. Most video cameras can be connected to the television so that the entire class can see what the camera is shooting.

### III. Production

The objective is to simultaneously record the sound and the corresponding images in sequential order. You are "editing" the project in the camera.

#### A. Recording sound and images.

1. At the beginning of your video tape, record for 30 seconds to a minute with the lens cap over the lens or with your hand held tightly in front of the lens (so that all the camera sees is black).

Whenever the camera is recording, it is recording pictures AND sound so ask the class to be completely quiet while any recording is taking place.

2. Set-up the camera to shoot the first image. Hold the camera very still or set it on a tripod. The student(s) reading the words that go with the first image should stand (off-camera) next to the camera's microphone. If sound effects or music are being used, the effects and/or music should be further away from the camera so that they don't drown out the readings.
3. Begin recording. Record for two or three seconds and then silently cue the student to begin reading. After the student reads the lines that go with the first image, let the camera continue recording for a couple of seconds, and then stop the recording. (Recording an extra two or three seconds at the beginning and end of each shot is important because some cameras rewind slightly each time the camera is stopped and started).
4. Now, set-up the camera and image for the second shot and continue with the process in #3 until you have completed all the lines and all the pictures.
5. When you have finished all the pictures and any ending credits, again record with the lens cap or your hand over the camera for about another minute. (This is just so you don't get "snow" as soon as the last picture is seen.)
6. Now you can simply rewind the tape and if the camera is hooked up to the TV, play the tape in the camera and watch the finished production. Or, take the tape out and play it in a VCR.

### Sample Collaborative Poems

#### INDIAN CORN

Spinning wheels of color  
like hands full of jelly beans  
The color wheels spin,  
spin until they're cold and hungry  
This one is the baby of the family  
too young to be picked  
but not too young to dance  
not too young to hear a lot  
or to be really smart

(Fifth Grade Class)

## ART

*Pictures in our mind are  
A key to a lock  
We consider everything that is possible*

*Thoughts and ideas  
Our imagination runs wild  
Color, rhythm, form, texture, contrast  
It's anything you want it to be*

*Thoughts provoked, ideas interpreted  
Hopes, fears, times, views, values  
We wonder*

*Symbolize yourself  
People all over the world understand it*

*The beauty of expression  
A perception of who we are  
Who we really are*

*That's art*

*(Middle School Class)*

## *The Basic Camera Shots*

When completing your video storyboard, you want to indicate what type of shot you are going to take of each image. You may even shoot the same image several times with different types of shots. Remember that it adds interest to your production if you use a variety of shots. Study the list of camera shots below. Then study the sample video storyboard. Did you notice that each shot is listed? Now you are ready to complete your own storyboard.

**Long Shot (LS)** This wide angle shot is usually used to give an overview of an interior or exterior scene.

**Medium Shot (MS)** This medium range shot is used to show the interplay of two people, two objects, etc. It gives us enough detail of each one to catch our interest but does not focus our interest on only one thing.

**Close-up (CU)** This shot concentrates exclusively on one person's face or on any one detail of a scene. It is the most compelling shot since it focuses our attention so directly.

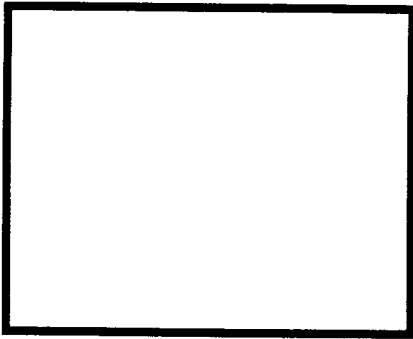
**Extreme Close-Up (ECU)** This shot should be used carefully as it can create a "shock" effect by filling the screen with one detail. In movies, it is sometimes used to focus the audience's eyes on a character's eyes or hands.

**Extreme Long Shot (ELS)** This shot creates a panoramic effect. It can be used to create a dramatic effect by setting a tiny human figure against a vast landscape, conveying a sense of dramatic isolation.

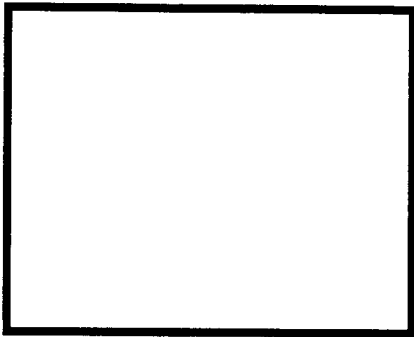
# STORYBOARD

VIDEO

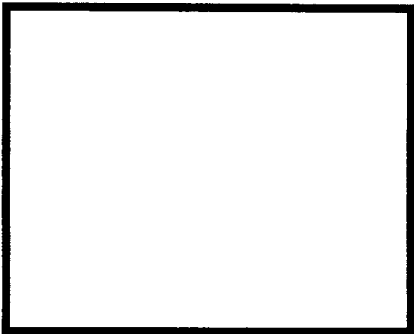
AUDIO



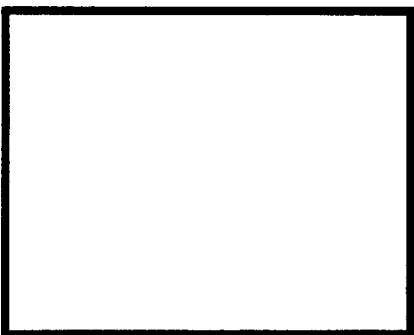
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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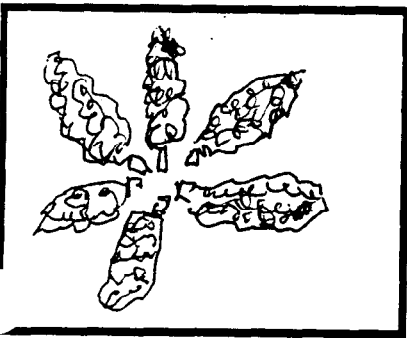
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
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## STORYBOARD

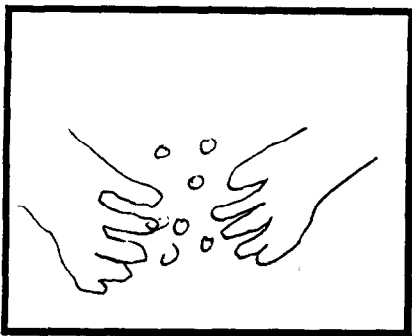
### VIDEO



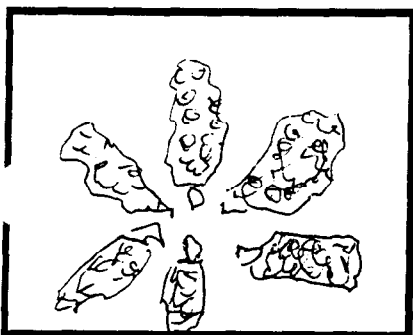
MS



MS



ECU



MS

### AUDIO

1. Sound effect -  
wind blowing

2. Spinning wheels  
of color

3. Like hands full  
of jelly beans

4. The color wheels  
spin.